



UNITED NATIONS

Department of Disarmament Affairs

Statement by

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On the occasion of the “Flamme de la Paix” Ceremony

Agadez (Niger)

25 September 2000

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with immense pleasure that I join the representatives of the people of Niger and of the international community, as we gather in this historic and beautiful city of Agadez to set alight

the “Flamme de la Paix”.

Today we celebrate the courage of a nation determined to move from destructive armed confrontation to building peace and managing political differences in peaceful and constructive ways. Today, we celebrate the vision of a government committed to democracy, stability, and the well being of the citizens that it was elected to serve.

This ceremony is much more than a simple disarmament affair. It affords us a privileged occasion to witness that peace and reconciliation are infinitely more valuable than ambitions of military victory. The “Flamme de la Paix” teaches us, yet again, that a nation that builds its own destiny is a powerful nation, a nation with a great future - a winning nation.

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Small arms are the weapons of choice in most contemporary conflicts, hampering social and economic progress, endangering societies, and undermining their hopes. Small arms are big killers that not only cause the death of people, but also annihilate dialogue. Most importantly, they destroy the opportunities to build a better future. As Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted in his Millenium Report to the United Nations General Assembly, “Small arms proliferation is not merely a security issue; it is also an issue of human rights and of development”.

Mr. President,

The journey to the “Flamme de la Paix” was not an easy one. We all recognize the obstacles you had to conquer, and the severe conditions under which you are building a peaceful and prosperous future. This makes your achievement so much more remarkable.

True to its Charter, the United Nations has been assisting your Government to address the multiple challenges of peacebuilding, through concrete contributions to the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law, and sustainable economic and human development. Let me briefly

outline some of these contributions over the last few years:

- The Electoral Division of the Department of Political Affairs has provided technical assistance to the Niger Independent National Electoral Commission in the preparation and conduct of the elections of October and November 1999.
- United Nations agencies such as the UNDP, UNICEF, IFAD and FAO represented in Niger have contributed with resources and technical advice to a number of actions in support of Niger's national development priorities in the areas of poverty reduction, good governance, environment protection, and promotion of the private sector.
- Following the signature of the ECOWAS moratorium on the importation, exportation, and manufacture of light weapons in West Africa, on 31 October 1998, the Department of Disarmament Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme have joined efforts in supporting the Programme for Coordination and Assistance in Security and Development (PCASED), the mechanism designed to implement this important regional disarmament measure. Within a post-conflict reconstruction framework, PCASED aims at promoting the reduction and ultimate elimination of excess weapons through comprehensive and voluntary weapons collection programmes. The destruction of weapons is the only credible and irreversible means of reducing weapons proliferation while maintaining national security. PCASED also encourages and supports the establishment and functioning of National Commissions to address the proliferation of illicit weapons within the states parties to the moratorium.
- In early August this year, and following a request by the Nigerien government for UN assistance in developing a weapons collection programme, my Department led a UN fact-finding mission to this country. This truly inter-agency mission – an example of the UN working together - supported by the Group of Interested States in Practical Disarmament Measures, included representatives of the Departments for Disarmament Affairs and Political Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, and the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa. The mission's main objectives were to examine the functioning and the needs of the National Committee for the Monitoring and Collection of Illicit Weapons,

evaluate the opportunities for a weapons collection pilot project, and assist in the formulation of such a project.

As a result of this mission, the United Nations Development Programme will shortly conduct an identification mission to N'Guigmi to further develop a project intended to bring practical results by lowering the number of weapons available, increasing security and offering community-based employment and income-generating development projects to the people.

As Secretary-General Kofi Annan pointed out in his Millennium Report, "Outright buy-back programmes may simply stimulate arms imports from neighboring countries, but non-monetary reimbursement schemes have worked in Albania, El Salvador, Mozambique and Panama. In return for weapons, individuals may receive tools, such as sewing machines, bicycles, hoes and construction materials, and entire communities have been provided with new schools, health-care services and road repairs. Not only governments but also the private sector can and should help fund such programmes. This would be a particularly appropriate contribution by major international corporations that have a presence in conflict-prone regions"

Mr. President,

When the UN fact-finding mission visited Niger, the people requested us to be your advocates within the international community, to amplify your voice in world forums. We reported back to the Secretary-General and to member states that we witnessed the deepening dialogue between the state and civil society; we observed the emergence of a new political culture of inclusion; and that we saw the important role traditional leaders play in public administration. In short, we saw how all parties concerned are seriously and genuinely committed to the peace process in spite of the enormous difficulties confronting the country.

We, the peoples of the United Nations, have therefore the responsibility to demonstrate solidarity with you through practical actions. You are not alone in your search for a better future.

We need the establishment of a broad partnership between Niger's internal actors, i.e. the Government, the former rebel organisations, traditional leaders, opposition parties, and civil

society, on the one hand, and the international community, i.e., the UN system, Niger's neighboring countries, and the international donor and business communities, on the other. This partnership would primarily assist Niger in addressing the pressing needs in the areas of poverty alleviation, good governance, and reform of the security sector.

Mr. President,

Peace is a precious gift to be consolidated and cherished. Let the fire of this "flame" inspire us all and light Niger's path to peace, stability and prosperity.

Thank you.